

Ahmad Alaadeen

Jazz Musician, Composer, Educator

Alaadeen, who is equally skilled and original on tenor and soprano saxophones, has made a major impact on the Kansas City jazz scene.

Born in Kansas City, Alaadeen grew up around music. "I listened to all types of styles. I went to Philharmonic concerts, loved Lester Young, liked T-Bone Walker and was crazy about Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson." He began on the saxophone when he was in sixth grade, in time also mastering flute, clarinet and oboe. Alaadeen took important lessons from Leo H. Davis, a well-respected music teacher, questionably reported to have taught Charlie Parker. "The way he taught improvisation was to sing the melody in my ear when I soloed so I'd always keep the melody in mind." Alaadeen debuted as a professional with Davis' concert band playing e-flat horn when he was 14 and his first major job was playing baritone sax with the great pianist-bandleader Jay McShann. In later years he would rejoin McShann on tenor.

Alaadeen studied at the Kansas City Conservatory of Music (studying flute since the educators did not think of the saxophone as a legitimate instrument), St. Mary's College (where he studied oboe) and DePaul University. He served in the military during 1957-59, being the jazz saxophonist and principle oboist with the 4th Army Band. After his discharge, Alaadeen spent time in Chicago, playing in a program led by pianist-composer Richard Abrams that was the beginning of the AACM; other members included trumpeter Lester Bowie and bassist Malachi Favors. The saxophonist picked up a lot of experience living and playing in such cities as New York, Chicago, Denver, Houston, San Antonio and St. Louis. In addition to McShann, he had opportunities to work in a countless number of settings including stints with Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, the Count Basie Orchestra, The Glen Miller ghost band under the direction of Tex Beneke, Della Reese, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, T-Bone Walker, Claude "Fiddler" Williams and with R&B stars, Rufus Thomas, Carla Thomas, Gladys Knight, Smokey Robinson, the Temptations, Four Tops and Sam Cooke.

After returning to Kansas City, Alaadeen not only played music locally but also became a very significant educator, teaching jazz in both the school system and privately. "I always tell my students that playing jazz is a hard life, that it is important to always study and be current, and that they should not be afraid to make mistakes." His skills as a teacher were recognized when he was inducted into the RT Coles/Lincoln High School "Outstanding Alumni Hall Of Fame."

During 1990-91, he won songwriting competitions sponsored by Billboard for his songs "Big Six" and "Blues For R.C." Along the way he recorded with Jay McShann, Crown Prince Waterford, the City Light Orchestra and countless others. He led the Deans of Swing in the 1990s and the ensemble was picked in 1996 as Musician Magazine's Best Unsigned Band.

On October 12, 2000, in a United States Congressional Record, Congresswoman Karen McCarthy recognized Alaadeen in the United States House of Representatives for the contributions he made to his community's understanding of its Jazz heritage. In 2002, at an official dinner applauding him for his outstanding achievements in the art form of Jazz, he was issued a Proclamation from the Office of the Governor, State of Missouri.

To document his music, Alaadeen started the 'ASR label. Each of his CDs, which include Blues For RC and Josephine Too, Time Through The Ages and New Africa Suite, features him with some of Kansas City's top young jazz players. And The Beauty Of It All has him heading a quintet that also includes pianist Harold O'Neal, bassist Seth Lee (both O'Neal and Lee were students of Alaadeen's when they were in high school), drummer Brandon Draper and percussionist Ray Stewart. "For this CD, I tried to pick out all of the beautiful notes that I could muster up," says Alaadeen. "This is not a CD for critics to pick apart or one that is exclusively for the musicians. It is for the everyday person to listen to and enjoy. I emphasize the melodies and I think women in particular will enjoy this album since there is a lot of feeling in it." Scott Yanow writes about Alaadeen: "He has the ability to caress melodies with a great deal of warmth, yet is never shy to stretch himself and take chances, pushing the music forward."

Alaadeen, who is now 73 and still very much in his musical prime, has in recent years been the recipient of the Jazz Heritage Award, the Missouri Humanities Council's Community Heritage Award, and the Missouri Arts Award. In 2006 he was presented Kansas City's "Lifetime Achievement Award."

Alaadeen looks towards the future with enthusiasm. "I've been traveling with my band, playing as often as possible and enjoying life." Having created a strong musical legacy that inspires younger generations, Alaadeen is ready to create further musical milestones.